



# Coals of Fire

## in Siuna

*If you were robbed more times than you have fingers, what would you do if you finally had a chance to visit your robbers?*

I looked straight into the lead robber's eyes. His gaze didn't flinch. "I want you to know that I love you and forgive you."

Did he understand why I was there? What would he do if he got out of prison, now that he knew I knew who he was?

About a month before, three robbers had held up a bus in broad daylight just outside of Siuna (about 100 kilometers east of Waslala, Nicaragua). After releasing the bus, the robbers had changed their clothes, hidden their guns in their backpacks, and nonchalantly caught a ride to Siuna on a truck. They thought no one would recognize them. They were from faraway Waslala. But a boy from the robbed bus caught a ride on the same truck and recognized the robbers. Once they arrived at Siuna, the boy ran to the police station and reported it. The police caught the guys, who still had the stolen money on them.

When I heard the news, I felt a strong urge to go to Siuna to witness to these robbers. I had a feeling they were the ones who had visited us two months before, on that last night in Kusulí. I told the family how I felt, but concluded, "It probably isn't them anyway. God has never allowed me to see any of my robbers again or talk to them. He probably never will. Besides, it's too dangerous."

Then one day the captain of the Waslala police came to talk to me. "Pablo, we think Siuna has your last robbers. Would you do me the favor of going with us to Siuna to identify them?"

"What would you gain by that?" I asked. "You know I will forgive them anyway."

"I know. But if we knew for sure they were your robbers, we could bring them to Waslala and prosecute them here too. We want to lock them up for a long time."

"I'll need to think about it and talk to the church. I'll let you know."

In our next minister's meeting we decided that if they would let us have a service for the prisoners, we would consent to go to Siuna. I took our answer to the captain. He was pleased. "I'll line everything up and we'll go next Friday."

Friday came and went. It seemed the captain had forgotten. I prayed and told God to work it out if it was His will. Then my uncle Paul from Tennessee came to visit us. "Hey, Paul, would you like to go to Siuna with me to see my last robbers?" I asked.

"Sure!"

The police captain was in Managua. We called from the police station to ask if we could go to Siuna the next day. "I wish you'd wait," he said. "I can't let you go alone. That zone is just too dangerous with all the guerrilla raids. In the last five months there have been eighteen people killed and eight kidnapped. If we go, I want to send at least thirty soldiers along. Can't we plan it later?"

I explained that my uncle was here only for several more days, and that we would gladly risk going alone if he would give me some kind of paper granting me permission to have the service.

“Well, all right. If you’re sure you want to do that. Let me talk to the officer, and I’ll get him to write it up for you. Good luck.”

The next day we left for Siuna. Uncle Paul, Jacinto, five national brethren, and I went to hold a service at the jail.

When we got to the jail, I told the brethren they had some time to explore Siuna, which was an old mining town. They left in high spirits to give out tracts and see the sights. “Be back in half an hour for the service,” I reminded them. Then I headed for the police station.

The Siuna police captain was not there, so I talked to the officer in charge. He took me to his office and we sat down. He read in my letter that I was to identify the three Waslala robbers.

“Are you the man who was robbed?”

“Yes.”

“What we do is let you peep into their room so they will not know you are here. That is a safety measure we offer.”

“Yes, I know, but this time we would like to have a service instead. We would like to personally tell the men about the love of God. Later I will tell you if our robbers were in the group.”

“Our accommodations here aren’t set up for a service. See,” he said, waving his hand toward the tiny buildings surrounding us. “We just don’t have room. We have these men in that old building practically piled on top of each other,” he continued, pointing to a dilapidated building. “What can we do?”

“Could I just meet with the three mentioned in the letter?” I asked, wondering what I could do now to get my brethren involved.

“Sure.”

We decided to hold the meeting right there in his office. The three men marched in and sat in a half circle in front of me. The officer left, placing a guard outside the door.

The time had come to face these men. I started with the one closest to me. I looked him in the eyes as I shook hands. I knew this fellow well! He was a neighbor! I just hadn’t remembered his name or recognized it on the list. I shook his hand. “How are you doing, neighbor? Good to see you.”

Then I turned to the next one. We both felt a shock as our eyes met. My feelings were mixed as I held his gaze. Here was the man who had threatened to kidnap my children if I didn’t get him 100,000 córdobas—the man who had caused my family to flee out a window and run for their lives. He

had taken my wife’s sewing machine and our good tape player. This man’s visit had been the last straw in our decision to leave our much-loved farm and seek sanctuary in the dirty town of Waslala. My heart skipped, but then pumped on steadily. As I looked into the robber’s hard eyes, God filled my heart with just what I had prayed for—love.

The next robber spooked me. As I shook his hand, I battled with doubt. Was this the skinny fellow who had come to the window that night and asked for tortillas? Something didn’t look right, and yet he seemed familiar...

First I spoke to Pepe, our friend and neighbor. But Pepe was behaving strangely. He turned his face to the side and seemed to take a special interest in the wall behind us. Giving up, I turned to the others. “Well, I found out you fellows were in jail, so I decided to come and visit you. Actually, we came to have a service for you, but they wouldn’t let us. They say they don’t have good enough conditions.”

“Yeah,” said the lead robber, whose name turned out to be Victor. “The conditions sure are poor around here. Who are you anyway?”

“I’m the minister of the Waslala church. I’m a neighbor to Pepe here.”

“What’s your name?”

“Pablo,” I answered, knowing perfectly well that he knew me.

“What did you come for?”

“I came to bring you a special message.”

“Why did you choose us three?”

“Well,” I stuttered. How long were we going to play this game? “You’re from Waslala. I just wanted to see you and visit you.”

As Victor and I talked, his eyes darted from side to side. He tried to act friendly, as if seeing me were just part of everyday life in the Siuna jail.

Meanwhile I kept my eyes on the other robber, José. He was nervous. He was shirtless, and his wiry body was covered with small tattoos. He was sweating profusely. His face seemed to change color, shades of gray and white.

Pepe was slowly loosening up and looked at me occasionally. But I wasn’t talking primarily to him. He wasn’t my robber. The other two were. To them I directed most of my speech.

“The message I bring to you today is something marvelous and special. It is for each one of you. It’s the reality that God loves you. Do you know that? He loves each one of

Here was the man who had threatened to kidnap my children...

you personally. So much that he gave his Son Jesus to die for you ...”

My hands trembled. My thoughts were jumbled. But I had done what I had so much wanted to do. I had told them about God’s love for them.

At the end I told them what that love does in our hearts. It makes us love others—even our enemies. Then I looked into Victor’s eyes and said, “I love you and forgive you, because Jesus loved me.”

After I finished, Victor said, “That is what we need. Someone to give us good advice. That’s why we do bad things sometimes. No one gives us good counsel. Like this stealing—it was our first time. There is hope for us. We won’t be doing it again.”

“Well, that’s why I came here. I wanted to tell you about God’s love and that there is still a chance for you because of that love. While you are here in jail, think about God and turn to him. You can be free spiritually, even if you are behind bars.”

“How did you find out about us?”

“We just heard about it and I wanted to visit you.”

“Did you come just to see us?”

“Yes.”

“Well, thanks for coming to visit.” The other two nodded their heads.

“Do you have some literature along?” Pepe asked.

“Sure, I’ll send some in later. I’ll send you some food too.”

“That’s great. The food here is awful.”

It was time to go. I had been with them for about twenty minutes. I again assured them of God’s love and our prayers. Were those tears in Jose’s eyes as I finished and shook this hand? Pepe’s? Yes, they couldn’t hide it. Love had struck home. Apparently Victor’s hard heart was cold as stone. But José and Pepe were touched.

The police wanted to hear how it went. I told him I was sure Victor and José were my last robbers. I was suspicious that Pepe had been involved too, though he had not come to my house that night. As I got up to leave, I asked if I could bring some food in for the prisoners. The officer stared at me, then began shaking his head.

“Hey, is that a problem for you?” I asked innocently. “If it’s against the rules ...”

“No, it’s not against the rules. It’s just that you were robbed by these men, and still you came to preach to them. And now you want to give them food.” Shaking his head again, he walked away. “Sure, send the food. No problem.”

After delivering three chicken plates with sodas, we headed home. I could just imagine what the Siuna police station was buzzing about. To them it seemed strange. But not to us as Christians. I had obeyed Jesus, and it had increased my love for the robbers and decreased my fear. But best of all was that feeling of having done just what Jesus would have done. The Bible calls such kindness “coals of fire.” It’s the kind of love that brings repentance. As I walked out of that jail, I was overflowing with it.

~ Pablo Yoder

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Pablo and Eunice Yoder serve the resurrected Jesus in Waslala, Nicaragua with their family. You may read more of Pablo’s experiences in the book *Angels in the Night*, of which this article is one chapter. This article is under copyright by TGS International, and permission is needed to reproduce it. The book *Angels in the Night* may be purchased from Christian Light Publications, 1050 Mt. Clinton Pike, Harrisonburg, VA 22802 (<http://www.clp.org/>).

Currently, Pablo and his family are spending a couple months experiencing the joys, frustrations, and challenges of helping a small congregation get off the ground in a little village several kilometers off the beaten path near their home in Waslala.

